

## **Six Women, Five Generations of History: One Life at a Time**

Gladys and Nan were of the same generation, but came from different areas of the country and different circumstances. Gladys, descended from hearty Irish immigrants and mother of three, escaped an abusive marriage in an age when divorce was unthinkable. Traveling down to the hills of Arkansas, she married and began a new life of service to her church and her community. Life wasn't easy; there were physical and financial challenges, but that didn't stop Gladys. She continued to serve and later in life, after the death of her husband, became a caretaker and companion to elderly shut-ins.

Nan grew up in the mid-west in humble circumstances, but married a man who "pulled himself up by his own bootstraps." Eventually the family moved to the big city where Nan's husband became the assistant superintendent of schools. Nan and her husband instilled in their children a love for learning, travel, and the great outdoors. Summers were spent as a family in the wilds of Canada where stars shown bright in the open skies and the eerie sound of loons broke the silence of night. Late in life, Nan taught herself to paint and became an artist of renown in her community proving that it's never too late to learn something new.

Gladys' daughter, Betty, married Nan's oldest son and they moved south to begin their new life together. While Betty's father didn't believe in women attending college or driving a car, she was ambitious and knew she had the ability to learn. After working to put her husband through school, Betty began attending classes part-time at the local college eventually earning a Bachelor's degree. At age 38, she learned to drive a car and made sure that her daughters learned too. Over the course of several years Betty made the 6 hour (~300 mile) commute several times weekly to finish a Master's degree at the University. Her love for learning and different cultures turned into a teaching position in the States and later in Germany when her husband transferred there. She enjoyed introducing her children and her students to other cultures.

This love of learning was passed on to her children too. They grew up in an age of earthy turmoil and the promise of the stars. The ground shook from rocket engine tests and starry skies were

viewed through a homemade telescope. Two daughters followed the path of service and social work while the third, Debbie, took to science and education. Debbie, dreamed of bathyspheres, oceans and shells in a time when women were not encouraged to pursue science, yet she continued, earning a Bachelor's degree in Biology. Marriage and two children may have dampened those initial dreams, causing a change in direction, but did not quench the desire to learn. Still moving forward, still learning, Debbie eventually earned a Master's degree in Library Service and used her organization and teaching skills at home, church, and work. Shells became a hobby; freshwater shells littered the house and eventually were featured in her book on the local fauna.

Debbie's daughter, Rebekah, grew up in an age of computers and abundant opportunities for women. Music, math, flag corps and helping others were her focus in school. Eventually earning a degree in computer science, she and her husband are teaching their children to use computers from an early age. The oldest aspires to be an astronaut—racing to the stars.

Sarah, so young and full of potential, is the fifth generation of women in this family. Divorce hit her parents early, so it's essential that her grandparents take up the role of teacher and encourager to ensure that she too will be able to move history forward when it's her time.

History has advanced much in these five generations. We've gone from handmade rolls, to brown and serve, to ready made; from transistor tubes, to microwaves and High Density Television; from the abacas, to calculator, to computer; and, from automobile, to airplane, to the Space Shuttle. Opportunities of education and career options for women have expanded tremendously, but so has the need for training, service and encouragement of the next generation(s).

It's important for us to remember that it's not always the BIG things in life that count. It is vital, however, that we pass on to succeeding generations a love of learning and a willingness to serve others. As women we have a part in this process no matter how small or big. Whether we find ourselves in history books or not, we must remember that history is written one line at a time and it advances forward one life at a time. Let's make our life count.